

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

“SECURING THE BORDER: BUILDING ON THE PROGRESS MADE”

MARCH 30, 2011

Thank you for calling this hearing today. I believe that it is appropriate and imperative that early in this Congress we take stock of the progress made along our southern border.

I recently returned from a visit to the Arizona/Mexico border. While at the Douglas Port of Entry, I was shown video taken three days earlier of a cartel-led execution in Agua Prieta, Mexico, mere yards from the Douglas Port of Entry. In the video, three trucks of men armed with fully automatic weapons sped down a busy street flashing police lights. After cordoning off a busy city block, they began shooting, firing over an estimated 400 rounds, killing an estimated five and wounding 17. This level of violence is new to Agua Prieta.

Ten years ago, we could not have anticipated the headlines that routinely appear in newspapers today, throughout the country, detailing the dangers along our southern border. For example, on March 3rd, Reuters reported, “Police link Arizona beheading to Mexican drug cartel;” the January 5th headline in The Los Angeles Times declared, “Mexico’s Drug Violence Respects No Borders;” and a March 6th headline in The Associated Press, “Gunmen kill 3 at bar near US consulate in Juarez.” While our border with Mexico has always seen some level of illegal immigration, it has not seen the powerful threat of deadly violence that exists today as a result of Mexico’s ongoing war against its drug cartels.

Fortunately, the extreme levels of violence in Mexico that has resulted in the killing of 36,000 Mexicans over the past four years has not spilled over into our border towns but many in Arizona fear it is getting closer.

As the witnesses today will testify, we are seeing progress along our land borders. I have witnessed this progress myself, particularly in the Yuma Sector, which has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of illegal border crossers. In the Tucson Sector, it appears illegal traffic has slowed due to the continuing economic recession, the increased numbers of Border Patrol agents, and the deployment of National Guard troops, and increased use of consequence programs like Streamline.

But progress is not success. And we are far from success in the Tucson Sector. As you will hear from the GAO, only 129 of the 873 miles of southwest border are considered to be under “operational control”. Additionally, the success our law enforcement agencies achieve at protecting our cities and towns, are often made at the expense of citizens that live in more rural areas. Just as the pressure applied by Border Patrol in Texas and California drove illegal traffic to Arizona, the efforts in Douglas, Nogales, and Yuma are sending the human and drug smugglers across Arizona’s ranches and farmlands, particularly in eastern Arizona.

This is why many people in southern Arizona feel like they are living in a no-man’s-land, abandoned by the Federal government and this Administration. It does not help that last year David Aguilar, deputy commissioner for Customs and Border Protection, was quoted in The Arizona Republic as saying that the border is not a fence or a line in the dirt, but a broad and

complex corridor. "It is," Aguilar explained, "a third country that joins Mexico and the United States."

By comparison, the improvements made in the Yuma Sector over the past few years have been a great accomplishment. Despite some peoples recollections, this progress was neither easy nor a foregone conclusion. Lest you forget, last decade, the Yuma Sector was as out of control as the Tucson Sector. Now it is viewed as a real success.

According to Border Patrol agents on the ground in Yuma, the formula was straight forward: surging the National Guard, increasing the number of Border Patrol agents, building double and triple layer fencing, and instituting consequences, like Operation Streamline, for those that come across illegally. I believe we can replicate the success that was made in Yuma in the Tucson sector.

On a final note, the announcement by the Administration last week regarding the removal of the National Guard currently deployed to the border is disappointing. Everyone I talked to in Arizona about the National Guard not only wants the Guard to stay on the border but to see its deployment expanded. According to federal law enforcement officials, the National Guard has been "indispensable." Their words, not mine. So it leaves me wondering why members of this administration, who claim that they want to make every effort to secure border, insist on taking two steps backward by removing the Guard prematurely.

Again, thank you for calling this hearing today.

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